GENTRIFICATION AND THE DECLINE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTS AND CULTURE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

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GENTRIFICATION AND THE DECLINE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN ARTS AND CULTURE IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

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DEDICATIONS

Dedicated to the memories of Lordeas G. Nix (Grannie), Andrelean Dubose (Granny), Keith Gatlin (Daddy), Jane Butler (Grandma Jane), Woodrow Jackson (Paw Paw), Lance Johnson (Munchie), and Mayor Marion Barry, former mayor of the city of Washington, D.C.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this this thesis is to investigate and examine the effects of gentrification on the African American arts and culture scene in the city of Washington, D.C. This study seeks to prove that the effects of gentrification contributed heavily to the displacement of the city's Black population, while simultaneously contributing to the decline of African-American arts and culture in the city, and disturbing the lives and careers of the African-American artists who call Washington, D.C. home.

The study discusses gentrification in the general sense, and moves on to discuss gentrification in the city of Washington, D.C. specifically. The thesis covers the various ways in which gentrification has contributed to the removal and attempted eradication of various examples of African American arts and culture in the city, primarily in its visual arts and music sectors, while questioning the authenticity of other attempts to preserve culture that, in many ways, seems appropriated. The thesis also discusses the notion that there are fewer available resources and funding opportunities for artists of color in Washington, D.C., while examining recent demographic changes in the city, primarily in areas that once held a Black majority that are now populated heavily by White residents.

The thesis concludes with the idea that gentrification does, in many ways, contribute to the decline of African American culture in the city. A way to combat gentrification is to recognize and include the already established community as part of the revitalization process to ensure that the community does not feel deprived.

INTRODUCTION

Washington, D.C., once nicknamed "Chocolate City", has long been known as a city rich in African-American arts and culture. There are numerous works dedicated to the presence of African-Americans in history throughout the city, including the African-American Civil War Memorial and the recently erected Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. These memorials along with the revitalization of important historical African-American destinations, such as the recent renovation and reopening of the Howard Theatre, is proof to some that policy makers and gentrifiers in the city are making an effort to preserve African-American arts and culture.

There are some who dispute this notion, however, believing that African-Americans, who make up a majority of the low income bracket, are being forced out of the city as a result of inflated housing costs brought on by gentrification. Neighborhoods in the district that formerly boasted an African-American majority, such as Petworth, U Street Corridor, LeDroit Park (where the historically Black Howard University is located), Brentwood, Eckington, Columbia Heights, Trinidad and Historic Anacostia, have all seen a decline in African-American population in the last ten years (Neibauer 2013).

According to Michael Neibauer, staff reporter with the Washington Business Journal, “New residents of these neighborhoods are younger. They are strong earners. They are condo dwellers. They are single. And as they’ve arrived, older residents and married couples have left in droves, according to the research, leaving a vast gap between the haves and have-nots. We use 'gentrifying' or 'transitioning' to define communities in

flux — those that have shifted wealthier or whiter or younger, usually at the expense of longtime, poorer residents" (Neibauer 2013).

The demographic changes in D.C. support the idea that White Americans are moving into many urban neighborhoods, as Black and Latino Americans seem to be moving out. In 1980, 70 percent of the city's population was Black, but that slowly began to decline. By 2000, the Black population was at 61%, and by 2010, Black's only made up 51% of the city's population. The Black population declined in 14 of 39 neighborhood clusters from 2000 to 2010, with about 6,700 fewer African Americans living in the Columbia Heights–Mt. Pleasant area. Petworth–Brightwood Park and Union Station–Stanton Park each lost about 5,000 to 6,000 Black residents. A few areas gained Black residents, such as Woodland and Ft. Stanton in Southeast DC (Lei and Tatian 2014). As of 2012, D.C.'s African-American population has dropped to 49.5% (DeBonis 2015).

In addition to Blacks moving out as they have done in prior decades, Whites and others are now moving in and are more likely to stay. Many of the areas where Blacks are moving out appear to be the same areas where Whites are moving in. Columbia Heights–Mt. Pleasant has gained 8,300 White residents between 2000 and 2010, while about 6,500 whites moved into the Union Station area. White residents largely avoided neighborhoods east of the Anacostia River, which are the areas where majority of the Black population live (Lei and Tatian 2014).

With new population trends showing a significant decrease in the African-American population and a substantial increase in the number of White residents in the

last five years, it is clear that these young, white professionals have been moving into the city at a high rate. The decline in the African-American population has led many to believe that Washington, D.C. will eventually be completely "whitewashed"; stripped of its authentic African-American culture in favor of a new, more cosmopolitan version of the city (Frank-Ruta 2012). So, what happens to culture when it is priced out? What is the cultural price of gentrification and redevelopment (Anderson et al 2014)?

There are many who feel that the effects of gentrification are not solely race-based, since artists of other races have also been impacted by the changing arts environment. But, there are also many African-American artists in Washington, D.C. who believe that the African-American arts and culture scene is fading because African-American artists can no longer afford to live in the city. It is believed that gentrification and the declining African-American population in Washington, D.C. has caused a decrease in the production, preservation and authenticity of African-American arts and culture in the city.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When analyzing the effects of gentrification on urban, predominantly black communities, it is important to first discuss what gentrification is, in the general sense. The term "gentrification" was most notably coined in 1964 by British sociologist Ruth Glass to describe the demographic and cultural shift that was happening in the London borough of Islington, as creative young professionals begin to move into the working class neighborhood inhabited largely by West Indian immigrants, revitalizing buildings, homes and many public areas. Glass coined the term "gentrification", incorporating the popular British term "gentry"- which is a term used to describe people of a specified rank or kind, usually of a high social or political class (Thomson 2014; Merriam Webster Dictionary).

Gentrification is a term that has since been used to describe the arrival of wealthier or more affluent people in an existing urban locality, resulting in property and rent increases and changes in the community's character and culture (Grant 2003). Though the most common use of the word is most directly associated with the arrival of the rich at the expense of the poor, many still question this definition of gentrification, including many social scientists who question what actually is the intended outcome of gentrification, what influences people to gentrify certain neighborhoods, whether or not gentrification is synonymous with displacement and what can be done to protect the existence of the original residents of these neighborhoods (Vandergrift 2006)? Most of

the time, the term is used negatively, signifying that poor residents are usually displaced from their own communities by wealthy outsiders. But the effects of gentrification are complex and contradictory, and its real impact varies (Grant 2003).

Many facets of gentrification seem desirable, and are, in many cases, deemed necessary by public officials and government organizations, such as reduced crime, new investment in buildings and infrastructure, and increased economic activity in urban neighborhoods. Gentrification has widely been attributed to suburban America's renewed interest in city life. This renewed interest has rejuvenated the quality of urban neighborhoods for many gentrifiers, few of which have been built since World War II. When people begin to flock to new jobs in neighborhoods and localities where housing is limited, pressure builds on areas that were once considered blighted. This happens mostly in areas with certain assets that make them desirable and suitable for change. The accessibility, diversity, and liveliness of urban neighborhoods are major attractions for gentrifiers. The availability of inexpensive housing is also a major draw, especially if the buildings are unique and appealing. Old houses and industrial buildings attract people looking to fix up old property as an investment opportunity (Grant 2003). Unfortunately, the new arrivals are usually the only ones who end up reaping the benefits of these changes, while the established residents usually find themselves economically and socially relegated (Grant 2003).

Gentrification has often been understood as the cause of much racial and economic conflict in many American cities. Neighborhood change is often seen as a social injustice, since wealthy, usually White, newcomers are often congratulated for

helping to improve neighborhoods, while poor, minority residents are often displaced by rapidly rising rents and debilitating economic change (Grant 2003). This idea of displacement, however, is one that has been heavily debated by various scholars and social scientists. In 2003, an important discovery was made by associate Columbia University professor of Urban Planning, Lance Freeman, who wanted to discover just how much displacement had affected Harlem and Clinton Hill, two of the most rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods in New York City. In Freeman's book *There Goes the 'Hood*, he reveals the surprising discovery that he was not able to find any definite relationship between gentrification and displacement, and that, as he writes, "poor residents and those without a college education were actually less likely to move if they resided in gentrifying neighborhoods." (Sternbergh 2009; Freeman 2006)

Freeman goes on to write, "The discourse on gentrification has tended to overlook the possibility that some of the neighborhood changes associated with gentrification might be appreciated by the prior residents.", later drawing contrasts between the decline of late-20th Century Harlem, and the heavily populated, booming atmosphere of early-20th Century Harlem. Though heavily considered a slum by some, early-20th Century Harlem sustained a wide range of services and opportunities. In later decades, those urban neighborhoods became drained of those opportunities and services, which helps to explain the lack of presumed displacement that occurred with the initial arrival of gentrification. Once neighborhoods improve, people attempt to stay in hopes of reaping some of the benefits of long-awaited revitalization, only to be faced with the reality that

the continual rise of rent, property taxes and the overall cost of living will eventually leave them no other choice but to relocate (Sternbergh 2009; Freeman 2006).

So, who exactly are the gentrifiers? Many point to the migration of groups of artists, tech savvy individuals and members of the LGBTQ community as the catalyst for gentrification, including author and American urban studies theorist Richard Florida. Florida, author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*, states that these groups of people, which he describes as "high bohemians" or “the creative class”, display the ability to influence high levels of economic development. He insists that this class nurtures highly functional, liberal and vibrant personal and professional urban environments. In his opinion, these environments generally tend to attract other creative individuals, ushering in high quantities of businesses, urban developments and financial stability. He suggests that attracting and retaining talented, young, liberally-centered professionals rather than focusing on large scale, commercial projects is a better way to ensure the renewal of urban environments and to secure urban resources for long-standing affluence (Florida, 2002).

There are some who go on to question if the arts and the increase in the number of artists moving into certain communities are directly responsible for the onslaught of gentrification. Adele Robey, founder of the Anacostia Playhouse, and the now defunct H Street Playhouse, recalls the first time she was asked to participate in a panel discussion about gentrification in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C.: “The place was packed and I would say it was racially-mixed, maybe 25 percent White,” she says, “And one of the comments was, and said semi-in-jest, was ‘Well, you know you can always tell

when the White people are coming because the arts come." (Landau 2014) Robey admits that the comment bothered her, and shares her opposing beliefs to that statement. "There are enormous quantities of talented emerging artists and already emerged artists who live over here East of the River, and they can't be marginalized. You can't say the arts are coming with the white people. The arts are here", she states, acknowledging that there are plenty artists who already inhabit these areas, and to not recognize them is detrimental to the acknowledgement of their existence in these areas (Landau 2014).

Robey is correct when she references the number of African-American artists who already populate D.C. neighborhoods, since there were artists who inhabited these neighborhoods long before this wave of gentrification. But, there are many African-American artists who believe that the presence of an already existing arts and culture scene, particularly African-American arts and culture, is what attracts many gentrifiers to urban neighborhoods. "Artists can't be gentrifiers, we're the natural resource. We're the welcoming element for the outsiders", stated rapper and D.C. native Head-Roc during a panel discussion at the Kennedy Center called *The State of the U: The Effects of Gentrification on D.C. Hip Hop*, when asked by fellow panelist Victoria Murray Baatin, Legislative and Community Affairs Director for the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities, whether or not they as artists look at themselves as early gentrifiers.

There is much debate over gentrification and what groups of people are mostly marginalized by the effects of gentrification. While many feel that the effects of gentrification are felt most heavily by minorities, especially members of the African-American community, there are many who do not define gentrification in terms of race,

such as artist and D.C. native Luis Peralta Del Valle. Del Valle states, “When it comes to the race thing, I know broke White people that can't pay their bills and they're losing their homes,” he says. “You can't put a color on gentrification.” Del Valle, like many others, believes gentrification has a lot more to do with money, specifically, who has it and how developing neighborhoods can see more of it. “It’s not about one race kicking out another. It’s more about certain people taking advantage of the opportunities being given,” Del Valle says (Landau 2014).

There seems to be an agreement amongst artists that gentrification is changing the climate of the District of Columbia, but there still remains much debate as to whether or not gentrification is largely responsible for the exclusion or misrepresentation of African-American culture in the city. It is clear that, in some respects, there is effort being made to preserve African-American culture in the city. The Howard Theatre, which was known for catering to a mostly African-American clientele in the early and mid-twentieth century, as well as hosting many of the prominent black musical artists of that time, reopened its doors in 2012 following a $29 million renovation (Ramanathan 2012) The Anacostia Community Museum, which focuses primarily on African-American culture and history of the Anacostia community over the years, also went through a major renovation in 2012. Under the direction of well-respected African-American curator and educator Camille Akeju, who seeks to reconnect the museum to the predominantly African-American community of Anacostia, the museum went through a renovation (Bass 2006). The museum still boasts an annual budget of $3.2 million as of 2015 (Newsdesk.si.edu).

Although there have been efforts to preserve much of the African-American culture of D.C., there are also seems to have been a wave of removal of black culture throughout the city, such as the removal of the historic Duke Ellington Mural that faces west on the side of the True Reformer building near the corner of 13th Street, NW and U Street, NW. In 2012, the mural was taken down leading some residents of the city to believe that it had been removed, probably in favor of some new demolition and reconstruction that has been planned for the heavily gentrified U Street Corridor. The mural, featuring the famous African-American jazz pianist, composer and native of Washington, D.C., is a symbol of the strong African-American history and culture of the city. After much speculation surrounding the mural's disappearance, it was confirmed by Zoma Wallace, a curator and arts collection manager at the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, that the mural, which is made up of a collection of tiles, was taken down by the Commission for repairs. It was to be reinstalled after the appropriate work is done to refurbish it (Austermuhle 2012).

But as of September 2015, the mural has yet to be reinstalled, even though it was confirmed by a spokesperson from the D.C Commission on the Arts and Humanities almost two years ago that a replica, not the original, will be re-installed soon. Regardless of the many promises to re-install the mural, it has yet to be installed, indicating to many that there isn't a strong desire to preserve this important and relevant example of African-American culture in a historically African-American section of the city.

Another example of the removal of Black culture in the city is the not so subtle eradication of one of the city's original and most celebrated art forms – go-go music. Go-go music is a blend of African tribal drum percussion, funk, rhythm and blues and hip-hop music that was originated in the District of Columbia during the 1960s and 1970s, primarily by a group called Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers.

Tensions surrounding go-go music have been ignited since the 1980s, when violence began to sweep through the numerous go-go clubs throughout the city. The tensions between go-go culture and city officials continued through the late 1980s and early 90s when the crack epidemic swept heavily across the city. It was a major problem in the African-American community as drug-related violence escalated as a result of this epidemic. Go-go clubs, one of the main hangouts for African-American residents, saw a huge increase in violence, especially drug-related murder.

It was during this time that many people outside the African-American community began to draw a connection between the number of homicides and go-go music. However, many disagree with this notion, insisting that increased crime in these social areas had nothing to do with the type of music that African-Americans listened to, but rather it was the result of the drug epidemic that plagued the community as a whole (Ali 2012). Nevertheless, many still upheld their belief that go-go music was somehow the cause for this increase in violent activity. As one Metropolitan police officer said during a 2005 hearing over nightclub violence, "It's this go-go. If you have a black tie

event, you don't have any problems. But, if you bring go-go in, you're going to have problems" (Ali 2012).

This idea that go-go music is the cause of violent crime has contributed heavily to the closing of dozens of go-go clubs throughout the city (Ali 2012). In May of 2011, DCentric's Elahe Izadi wrote, "For many years now, go-go venues have been shut down inside D.C. due to club violence and liability issues, pushing the music further out into the Maryland suburbs like Prince George's and Charles Counties. Meanwhile punk rock, another D.C. musical mainstay (which is traditionally, though not exclusively, performed by White musicians) is not experiencing the same bad luck" (Izadi 2011). Go-go music is now slowly making its way back into the city after the lifting of the ban, but not without major obstacles, including limited venues (since dozens of go-go venues throughout the city are now either razed or defunct) and the general public disdain and distrust that many residents and venue owners have recently acquired for the music and the crowds that the music tends to attract.

There are many who argue that African-American culture is not being eradicated, and will insist that a lot is being done to preserve the culture. In the U Street Corridor, for example, there are such businesses as Busboys and Poets, Eatonville (soon to be renamed Mule Bone), Marvin, and the popular Reggae Nightclub Patty Boom Boom, all of which are based on some facet of black culture. Busboys and Poets was named in honor of poet Langston Hughes, who was a busboy in D.C. shortly before getting his first poem published. Eatonville (Mule Bone) was named in honor of African- American author Zora Neale Hurston's Florida hometown, as well as her work with fellow author, poet and

friend Langston Hughes. Marvin is named in honor of legendary singer Marvin Gaye, who is a D.C. native.

While these businesses stand as an example of the preservation of the African-American experience in D.C., there are some who argue that these businesses seem inauthentic, since many of the businesses are not owned by African-Americans and, despite being rooted in different aspects of African-American culture, serve a fairly large White clientele, many of whom are not D.C. natives and can potentially be defined as gentrifiers. For journalist and D.C. native Stephen A. Crocket, Jr., there is a cultural "swagger-jacking" happening, – a term that Crockett presumably derives from the urban slang use of the words "swagger", which refers to a person's style or way of being, and "jack", which means to steal or take away, usually with force - indicating his belief that African-Americans in Washington, D.C. are having their history and culture stolen from them by White Americans who are seeking to use it to their own benefit. In his article *The Brixton: It's new, happening and another example of African-American historical 'swagger-jacking'*, he writes: "Point is, there is a certain cultural vulturalism, an African American historical 'swagger-jacking,' going on near U Street. It's an inappropriate tradition of sorts that has rent increasing, black folks moving further out — sometimes by choice, sometimes not — while a faux black ethos remains" (Crockett 2012).

Crockett acknowledges not only the reputed inauthentic appropriation of Black culture in the neighborhood, but he also acknowledges the influx of this apparent inauthentic appropriation as African-American residents are pushed out of these neighborhoods. In his perspective, the people are pushed out, but their spirit is retained

and remixed to appeal to a majority white population. Crockett goes on to further display his disapproval of this "swagger-jacking", stating "Here's a news flash to those who don't know: This place was a place well before you. You didn't discover us. We aren't Indians. You didn't make Ben's [Chili Bowl]; we did. This city was pig intestines after so many left, and we made it into chitterlings. And these places, these fancy places with 'authentic' food, aren't homes. They're just rentals" (Crockett 2012). Here, Crockett attempts to candidly inform "the outsiders" that there was a culture here before they moved in, in a place that was trash to many, but home for the people who already lived there.

Author and D.C. native Natalie Hopkinson discusses in her book *Go-Go Live: The Musical Life and Death of Chocolate City* a similar theory to Crockett's, stating ""During the decades that Washington had a Black majority, national policy makers and investors left the city's aging infrastructure for dead. So it is astonishing to witness the about-face that has accompanied the influx of White professionals in the past decade. Now there are urban-friendly transportation policies, lavish corporate spending on education and billions in private real estate investment and development. As residents finally get the city they have always deserved, many Black Washingtonians are feeling the rage of the loyal first wife, kicked to the curb as soon as things started looking up" (Hopkinson 2012). Here, Hopkinson perfectly illustrates the fact that there has been a switch in the way that developers and policy makers view the city, since at one time D.C. was left blighted and undesirable. Now that there's opportunity in these once dilapidated communities, developers are pouring in for a piece of it all, while simultaneously

displacing the original residents from neighborhoods that they've waited to see improve for so long.

GENTRIFICATION AND AUTHENTICITY

The subject of artistic authenticity is one that arises as we further discuss gentrification and its effects on the African-American community in Washington, D.C. *Art and Authenticity* by Megan Aldrich and Jocelyn Hackforth-Jones, explores a range of questions that surround the ideas of authenticity and originality in art. The authors of *Art and Authenticity* go further than the central question of 'Is it genuine?', and moves more into topics that surround authenticity as a major idea spread out across different time periods and circumstances. The authors mention that individual "expert" knowledge about the subject of authenticity means very little in the current state of art. However, recent attempts by experts to develop some type of scientific reasoning for discussing authenticity in art is also proving to be problematic. The book goes on to suggest that, although this concept of authenticity is not invalid, it creates somewhat of a moving target within the frameworks of various cultural and historical ideas. The authors pose a challenge to the reader to look at the interpretation of 'authenticity' from various different perspectives, since the issues surrounding authenticity are rarely black and white (Aldrich and Hackforth-Jones 2012).

The idea that these issues surrounding authenticity are not all black and white is not far off the mark, since restaurant and music venue Marvin, for example, has been one of the few establishments that has welcomed go-go music performances as they began

trickling back into the city after the attempted ban (a ban that has still left dozens of go-go venues permanently closed throughout the city), despite the White owner being accused by many of inauthentically replicating Black culture. Nevertheless, many argue that the issues surrounding authenticity, while complex, still demonstrate an outcome that is more substantial for those who move in to revitalize neighborhoods than for those who originally inhabit them. Such was the case with Chinatown in downtown Washington, D.C, which was once a bustling corridor for Chinese businesses and restaurants.

Chinatown and the U Street corridor were both hit hard with demolition during 1968 when the death of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. caused many to riot in various urban communities throughout America. After the riots, the city's rising crime rate, higher taxes and deteriorating business climate forced many Chinese residents to move out into the suburbs during the 1960s and 1970s. In the African-American community, those who could afford it began moving out into Prince George's County, Maryland leaving many of the poorer residents behind in deteriorating urban neighborhoods. This is not to say that all of D.C.'s residents lived in poverty, but that many of the city's affluent former residents poured a great percentage of their resources into the growing communities in Prince George's County.

The revitalization of Chinatown, however, started before the revitalization of the U Street corridor and other hard hit, predominately African-American neighborhoods. Between the 1970s and early 1980s, the D.C. government completed its redevelopment plan for the Convention Center and Sports Arena and projected the construction of the now razed D.C. Convention Center at the center of Chinatown between 9th and 11th

Streets in order to increase commerce in the District. By the late 1980s, only 25 percent of the businesses in Chinatown were Chinese owned. This continues to pose obstacles for preserving the authenticity of Chinatown today with only 30 Chinese-owned and operated businesses remaining. (Wang 2015; Washington.org)

The regeneration of Chinatown stands as one of the earliest examples of gentrification and the tendency of gentrifiers and policy makers to try to recreate the authentic cultural dynamics that exist within marginalized communities. Many artists and cultural appreciators have openly criticized this inauthentic re-creation or cultural appropriation. They have also criticized the lack of respect or consideration given to the already existing African-American culture throughout many gentrifying neighborhoods in the city. Events such as the demolishing of the Chuck Brown mural on the side of the soon to be demolished, black-owned Sweet Mangos Café in the Petworth neighborhood – a mural painted by middle school students in honor of the late great musician and "Godfather of Go-Go," Chuck Brown - are leading many to fear that important aspects of the culture that helped to shape the character of the city will be lost if the African-American population continues to decline as a result of gentrification.

METHODOLOGY

The ideas presented in the literature review were tested through interviews with African American artists who have experienced gentrification and its effects in Washington, D.C. I have conducted four interviews, which portray accurate and in-depth information regarding gentrification and how it affects African-American arts and culture, as well as the community as a whole. The interviews were conducted over the course of one year, and all data collected during the interview process was categorized, coded and utilized appropriately as part of my thesis research. The artists interviewed include:

- Briona "Ivory Haze" Jackson – Vocalist and songwriter
- Wayson R. Jones - Visual and spoken word artist
- Afi "Afi Soul" Lydia - Vocalist, songwriter, actress and educator
- Gina Marie Lewis – Visual/mixed media artist, curator and educator

All interviewed artists are either natives of Washington, D.C., or have lived in Washington, D.C. for a significant portion of their lives, and are able to provide valuable information regarding their experiences in the African American arts and culture scene in the city before and after the most recent wave of gentrification.

All the artists are also very well established and well esteemed in their respective genres. Briona "Ivory Haze" Jackson has recently garnered much attention and acclaim as a rising artist in the Washington, D.C. music scene with the release of her single *Statue of Liberty* and the subsequent release of her debut album by the same name, which is set

to be released in March of 2016. She is a graduate of The Duke Ellington School of the Arts and holds a BM in Vocal Performance from George Mason University.

Multi-faceted artist Wayson R. Jones has been engaged in various art activities in a career that has spanned over three decades. As a spoken word artist and musician, he has performed locally and nationally with renowned activist and spoken word artist Essex Hemphill throughout much of the late 1980s and early 1990s. As an abstract visual artist, Jones' work has been exhibited in various venues throughout the Washington metropolitan area and abroad, and can be found in many corporate and private collections. He holds Bachelor of Music from University of Maryland, College Park.

Critically acclaimed artist Afi "Afi Soul" Lydia has been hailed the "Queen of D.C. Soul", and has been recognized nationally and internationally after her album *Lovely* landed the number 10 spot on the SoulTracks Top 10 albums list, putting her in a class with artists such as Erykah Badu, Angela Johnson and Jill Scott. She holds a BFA in Musical Theater from Howard University.

Gina Marie Lewis, Assistant Professor of Art at Bowie State University, is also a mixed media artist and curator who has curated numerous exhibitions throughout the Washington metropolitan area. Her work has also been exhibited at various art galleries throughout Washington, D.C., Maryland, Virginia and abroad. She holds a BA in Fine Arts and Cultural Studies from Norwich University, and a MFA in Painting from Howard University.

CHAPTER ONE

When asked about the city of Washington, D.C. before the rise of gentrification, many artists acknowledged that the overall atmosphere of the city was completely different. Singer, songwriter, actress, dancer, educator and D.C. native Afi "Afi Soul" Lydia remembers growing up in an extremely Afrocentric and vibrant community where she grew up on "beautiful music" – everything from Indian Sitar music to Aretha Franklin and Mahalia Jackson- before eventually breaking onto the U Street music scene, which featured predominantly African-American artists (Lydia 2014).

For Lydia, the shift began to happen in late 1980s and early 1990s after the construction of the Municipal building on 14th Street and U Street Northwest, which was initiated by the late Marion Barry, former Mayor of Washington, D.C. "Marion Barry was trying to do something good for the African American community", she recalls (Lydia 2014). The construction of the Municipal building ushered in a wave of revitalization, as grants became available for homeowners to buy and fix up their homes and more businesses began to open, giving artists like Lydia more venues and spaces to perform. But that soon began to change when "the outsiders" wanted a piece of the action. "The outsiders," Lydia explains, were residents who began to move into predominately African American neighborhoods. Many of the new residents at that time were White, middle class individuals and families who did not understand the culture of the city. The culture of the city, which included spontaneous neighborhood concerts and "junkyard bands" playing on various corners, began to make many of them uncomfortable, so many

newcomers began to look for ways to adjust the already existing culture to fit their needs, instead of allowing the culture to thrive and adjusting themselves to the change (Lydia 2014). The notion of the housing and business boom playing a major role in the gentrification of D.C. is shared by visual artist, curator and educator Gina Marie Lewis who firmly states, “Real estate was the impetus for the change” (Lewis 2015).

Lewis also recalls a very different version of D.C., arriving in 1994 to a very “afro-centric” version of D.C. She recalls that there used to be lots of festivals, including the Mount Pleasant Festival, Jazz on the Mall and the African Drumming in Malcolm X/Meridian Park every Sunday. She also recalls the years 1998-1999 when she began to notice a huge shift, as housing prices started to rise and young, White couples began to move in, making it hard for anyone to find a decent home in the city at a reasonable price. Gentrification also began to change the demographics and leadership of city arts organizations in the community, and it was at this time that many artists, especially African-American artists, began moving to Prince George’s County, Maryland for more space at a lower price (Lewis 2015).

Visual and spoken word artist Wayson R. Jones, who has lived in D.C. since 1963, also remembers a completely different city. As a trailblazing member of D.C.’s African American LGBTQ spoken word scene in the 1980s and 1990s, Jones, along with his cohort and fellow spoken word artist, the late renowned Essex Hemphill, were performing in venues before there was any sign of development. “There was no development”, he states. “Downtown was very grungy and very gay.” When speaking of the beginning of gentrification in the city, Jones states, “I was part of that first wave,

unknowingly. I was a part of that break in the ice. It's gay people and artists that come in first, and if enough of those two groups congregate, middle class White people will say the neighborhood is 'hip' and 'funky' now, and that's when the predation starts" (Jones 2015). Jones' idea echoes some of the ideas expressed by American Urban Studies theorist Richard Florida, which was discussed earlier. The only difference, it seems, is that Jones views this rise of the creative class, as Florida describes it, as "predation," whereas Florida views it as an inevitability and somewhat of a necessity in urban revitalization.

The "predation" that Jones speaks of is somewhat of a running theme that comes up when discussing gentrification with African-American residents and artists who have been affected by the most recent wave of gentrification in Washington, D.C., even in the least bit. This predation – the taking and revamping of something by newer residents without regard for the already established community- is what appears to be the biggest offense in this matter. Many African Americans sat in low income situations for years before anything happened, so, to many, the question now is: Why all of a sudden? Singer, songwriter and actress Briona "Ivory Haze" Jackson states, "I'm not saying that these areas shouldn't gentrify, but why is it that for so many years there wasn't any improvement until, all of a sudden, there's profit to be made. You have all of these young professionals coming from the North and the West, so now you can skyrocket these prices and put them up in these high rises in 'the hood' – basically. But, they don't know it's the 'hood because it's set for them" (Jackson 2015).

Jackson, the youngest of the interviewed artists, traces her experience with gentrification back to 2005 when she, a high school student at the time attending The Duke Ellington School of the Arts, remembers her family receiving a pamphlet in the mail detailing some impending revitalization plans in the city. There seemed to be a promise for many positive changes in this pamphlet that were supposed to benefit the community, but for the last ten years she has watched many of these changes continue to displace people of color throughout the city. “The displacement of people, the displacement of culture, the displacement of music is happening in every aspect of this city”, she decrees. “What they’re really doing is creating a new history” (Jackson 2015).

This feeling of displacement and cultural erasure is shared by many artists who have worked and lived in the city of Washington, D.C. during the change. During a panel discussion at the Kennedy Center entitled *One Mic: The State of the U: The Effect of Gentrification on DC Hip-Hop*, a panel of nine artists who either currently live or have lived in DC before and during the most recent wave of gentrification discussed their experiences with gentrification, how it has affected them and their art, as well as how it has affected the community as a whole. The panel, moderated by performance artist and cultural organizer Jess Solomon, consisted of nine artists, curators, business owners and arts administrators, including:

- Rhome “DJ Stylus” Anderson - DJ, music producer, writer, cultural curator and D.C. native.
- Victoria Murray Baatin - Legislative and Community Affairs Director for the DC Commission on the Arts and Humanities.

•Toni Blackman - Rapper/Emcee, writer and U.S. Hip Hop Ambassador

•Omrao Brown - part owner, operator and programmer of both Bohemian Caverns and Liv Nightclub.

•Raquel Brown - Poet, spoken word artist and educator.

•Brent "Munch" Joseph - Cultural curator, DJ, producer and proprietor of HedRush Agency.

•Head-Roc - Distinguished Rapper/Emcee, writer and D.C. native.

•Marc Powers - Music curator.

•Cory Stowers - Writer, visual artist and recording artist.

When asked about gentrification and what it meant to them, the panelists had very strong opinions. Raquel Brown stated, "If you've moved to D.C. within the last five years, gentrification is the difference between moving to Washington, D.C.- The District of Columbia and moving to 'Chocolate City'." Ms. Brown goes on to express that the root of it all is money with the "Haves" pushing out the "Have Nots". "It doesn't even feel like they built over our graves, but it feels like they buried us alive", she says (Anderson et al. 2014).

Other artists on the panel chimed in as well, including nightclub owner Omrao Brown, who says that gentrification tends to happen in areas of cities that are mostly Black. "[Gentrifiers] are usually White and potentially American", he says, meaning that most gentrifiers are usually White Americans, despite the fact that D.C. also boasts a heavy immigrant population. Rhome "DJ Stylus" Anderson asserts that gentrification is

"evolution combined with inflation, minus context", acknowledging many gentrifiers' tendency to welcome the social and economic change that happens as a result of gentrification without respecting the culture that existed before the change (Anderson et al. 2014). This culture, in many respects, has helped to lay the groundwork for much of the newness being presented in Washington, D.C. and other gentrifying cities.

Toni Blackman makes one of the most compelling and thought provoking arguments when she asks, where do we draw the line in this cycle of gentrification? "Gentrification breaks hearts. Gentrification destroys culture. Gentrification breaks up communities, and it kills history. We see buildings coming down, and we see culture coming down," she states, drawing a comparison between the physical destruction of buildings during the gentrification process and the cultural, economic, social and emotional destruction of the communities that were in place before gentrification (Anderson et al. 2015).

This destruction is easy to see, especially with incidents such as the most recent planned revitalization of the Barry Farm, Lincoln Heights/Richardson Dwellings, Northwest One, and Park Morton neighborhoods in D.C. Currently, hundreds of predominately black families in these neighborhoods are preparing to be forced from their homes to make way for a massive redevelopment project, in which these neighborhoods and the homes in them will be razed and new "mixed-income" units as well as commercial spaces will be built in their place (Nevins 2015).

According to Head-Roc, this destruction is also seen as responsible for the sense of brokenness felt by many artists in the city. He states that that this brokenness is the

reason why the Kennedy Center's theatre at Millennium Stage was not as full as he feels it should have been during the panel discussion, alluding that large numbers of artists who were involved in the D.C. arts and Hip-Hop scene did not show up to the panel discussion. He indicates that these artists are no longer as active or passionate in the community as they once were because the communities have been shattered by gentrification, since many of the places where these artists were given a platform to create and perform no longer exist. He states, "People are literally heartbroken. People are broken about it." This concept of brokenness was supported by Toni Blackman, who added that the brokenness is not just here in D.C., but it's impacting all genres of the arts in communities all across the country. "It's impacting generations of artists who are no longer benefitting from opportunities to create and express themselves", she states (Anderson et al. 2014).

The statements of Head-Roc and Blackman seem to be supported by sentiments expressed by citizens of other cities that are being heavily gentrified across America, including New York City, Detroit and New Orleans, just to name a few. Many of these cities have seen a large resurgence of young up-and-comers who are moving into urban neighborhoods that were once largely populated by minorities. For example, the New York borough of Brooklyn has been experiencing this in the most recent years, while Harlem, a historically African-American section of the borough of Manhattan, has already been gentrified to a great extent (Spradley 2013).

Also, in New Orleans, the neighborhood of Treme, the first neighborhood in New Orleans designated solely for free people of color, for example, has also seen a great

wave of gentrification, along with various other neighborhoods throughout the city. Some believe that gentrification is the cause for a proposed noise ordinance in the city, since the ordinance has been introduced as a result of the number complaints recently allegedly filed by newer residents and gentrifiers who have not fully adapted to the atmosphere of certain neighborhoods in the city (Fensterstock 2013).

The ordinance has sparked protests from musicians and members of various communities throughout the city who believe that a noise ordinance is an affront to the unique culture of the city of New Orleans. Those who have been born and raised in the city, and those who have lived in the city for a while and have grown to love and appreciate the many distinctive characteristics of the city's culture, believe that gentrification is forcing them to conform to rules that will eventually eradicate, change or inauthentically replicate the city's culture (Fensterstock 2013).

Washington, D.C., like New Orleans, has always, until recent years, been a city with a predominately African American population. While this study will focus on Washington, D.C. and how gentrification is contributing is affecting the city’s African-American arts and culture scene, examining the effects of gentrification as it relates to the changing climate of cities with majority African American or minority populations can also prove effective in the general sense. The study can help ignite conversations regarding the effects of gentrification across the country, while attempting to address what can be done to maintain the presence of marginalized cultures.

CHAPTER TWO – ARTS FUNDING

When examining the effects of gentrification in the arts community of Washington, D.C., it is important to first examine the arts funding trends and practices in the city and how funds are divided. Most of the funding awarded to arts organizations in the city comes through the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities. According to Ally Schweitzer of The Washington City Paper, "Mayor Vince Gray's proposed 2014 budget cuts the District's Commission on the Arts and Humanities budget by more than 40 percent." That decrease comes mostly from the loss of last year's one-time $6.8 million gift from the D.C. Council, which was responsible for the boost to the commission's budget. Without the extra padding, the DCCAH's budget sunk from $11.9 million in 2013 to about $7 million in 2014. DCCAH took the $6.8 million boost and divided it up into various grant programs. These grants were awarded to some of the largest and most established organizations in the city, including the Kennedy Center, The Washington Performing Arts Society and The Shakespeare Theatre Company (Schweitzer 2014).

DCCAH has also provided such programs as Arts Building Communities, which provides grants, performances, exhibitions, and other services to individual artists, arts organizations and community groups and organizations so that they can express, experience and access the rich cultural diversity of the District. Other programs include DC Creates Public Art and Arts Learning and Outreach, which consists of two different programs. These are Arts Learning for Youth and Lifelong Learning (dcarts.dc.gov).

While some things are looking up for certain organizations in regards to arts funding, a report from the Greater Philadelphia Cultural Alliance entitled *Culture Across Communities: An Eleven-City Snapshot*, which compares data from more than 5,000 cultural nonprofit organizations following the economic downturn of arts organizations in nearly a dozen cities all over the country between 2009 and 2012, including Washington D.C., reported that D.C. saw a 48 percent decline in foundation funding. Despite the fact that individual giving was up more than 42 percent, the decline in foundation giving was the second largest in the country. Most of the cities included in the report saw a decline in government funding (Kurzius 2015).

Earned income for cultural organizations still grew by 3 percent in the city between 2009 and 2012. This is thanks to having one of the strongest ticket revenue increases in the report, only second to New York City. But, while tickets have been selling, D.C. has seen a 3.1 percent drop in paid employment in the arts, the largest of any examined region (Kurzius 2015).

Arts funding in D.C. remains a very sensitive topic, especially to artists who feel slighted by many funders who don't seem to support the ventures of individual artists and African-American artists alike. This is especially true for rapper Head-Roc, who insists that there is favoritism being placed on artists of a certain caliber, and artists from the African American community are getting the short end of the stick. He insists that there seems to be a sabotage in place to get rid of what is not considered premium art in Washington, D.C. "They're promoting hybrid forms of Hip Hop, [such as an Asian girl with a violin] and calling it 'Hip Hop', and not the raw, grittiness that comes from these

streets", he states. He goes on to say that most of the money being fueled into the arts comes from a "grants game," in which only certain artistic ventures get funded by the government. "They're not going to pour money into what we are doing because they don't want us talking about what the government is doing wrong" (Anderson et al. 2014)

In a 2011 report prepared by the researcher and arts advocate Holly Sidford for the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, Sidford reported that 55% of contributed income in 2009 (gifts and grants) went to the 2% of arts organizations with budgets over $5 million. Statistics from the NCCS indicate that in 2012, 1% of those arts organizations with budgets over $10 million received close to 50% of all contributed funding for the arts. Though Sidford's report does not intend to necessarily support ideas similar to Head-Roc's, which argue that government funding is only poured into what is considered premium art, her work speaks to a much larger picture; The unbalanced rationing of funding to mostly large, conservative, Eurocentric arts organizations, which is accepted by default and seems justifiable to many. This occurs largely because organizations like Lincoln Center or the Kennedy Center seem to serve so many more people than the smaller ones, despite the fact that the numbers tell a different story (Horwitz 2016).

According to the NCCS's statistics, out of the approximately 40,000 arts organizations in the country with budgets over $25,000 per year, there are approximately 450 organizations whose budgets are over $10 million. Sidford explains that his means that there are 39,570 organizations who are serving significantly greater numbers of people, even if they are only serving an average of 1,000 people a year. It isn't surprising

that, given these structural impediments to equity, the sector's definition of what legitimately constitutes "the arts" doesn't reflect America's evolving demographics. By excessively supporting large institutions, which reach only a minute portion of the American population, mega-donors and corporate foundations use the arts to serve the 1% (Horwitz 2016).

Head-Roc's comments regarding the "grants game" and how only certain forms of non-resilient or non-complacent artistic expression are being funded is another example of the muzzling of Black manifestation. The notion that an effort is being made to silence African-American artists connects also with the historical tendency of predominately white institutions to silence Black resistance in an effort to value the safety of those who are not of African descent while not respecting or fully understanding the culture and customs. Head-Roc's other comment regarding the tendency of organizations to promote hybrid forms of Black art ties directly into the belief that African-Americans are being barred from their own culture while others seek to appropriate it.

Afi Lydia also shares her experience with the "grants game" in D.C. She states that she, like many artists in the city, applied for a grant from the DC Commission on Arts and Humanities. She also states that most of the African-American artists who applied for the grants didn't get them, despite the fact that they were highly deserving. "The list of who received grants included very little to no black individual artists. Black D.C. residents are not being funded", she insists. Lydia goes on to say that, while the panel included people of color, there is a belief among many artists of color in the D.C. area that there may actually be another panel that sits above this panel that has the final

say on who is funded, and this panel may include very little or no people of color (Lydia 2014). Whether these claims are true or untrue is up for debate, but it speaks highly to the reality that local artists are skeptical of how government funds are allocated to local artists, which speaks further to the skepticism and discontent shared by African-American artists and residents regarding the objective of the gentrification process as a whole.

While there seems to be a belief among African-American artists and artists of color in Washington, D.C. that there may be a very deliberate, underlying organizational agenda to not fund artists who are D.C. natives, particularly artists of color, by creating panels that include very little to no people of color, the DC Commission on Arts and Humanity's most recent call for panelists negates this notion. Currently, on the DC Commission's website, the call for panelists is as follows:

"The D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities' current call for panelists for fiscal year 2016 also encourages artists from various backgrounds to apply. Residents of the District of Columbia metropolitan area are encouraged to nominate themselves or their peers to serve as a panelist. Selected panelists will demonstrate expertise through involvement in one or more sectors of the creative economy in the District for a minimum of two years. Individuals with arts and humanities backgrounds make the strongest candidates (i.e. artists, arts administrators, arts educators, gallery professionals, curators, art critics, etc.) The DCCAH supports panel diversity in all forms: age, race, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, artistic discipline, location, etc."

The presentation of this call for panelists doesn't prove that the artists are wrong in their beliefs, however, it does illuminate the fact that there may be a need for clarity

and a call for more diversity on the Commission's part, and a need for artists to further educate themselves on the procedures for selecting panelists. If there is no hidden agenda, there may be spaces and opportunities for artists of color to participate as panelists to help ensure that African-American artists, as well as other artists of color, individual artists, and D.C. natives are being funded. This idea was expressed by panel leader Jess Solomon during the Kennedy Center panel discussion, in which she stated that there are opportunities for African American artists to sit on panels to help decide which artists get funded. She goes on to state that she has sat on panels and fought hard for respected fellow artists and peers to be funded, while encouraging fellow artists and panelists to do the same (Anderson et al. 2014).

CHAPTER THREE – MUSIC

Music has always been an integral part of African culture. In Africa, drums were used as a form of communication, and were an essential component in the organization of slave uprisings in America. African drumming was also used as a form of celebration, as they were in New Orleans' Congo Square on Sundays when slaves were given an "off day" to congregate, sing, dance and worship. This spirit of congregation is something that has lasted through African-American culture, not just in the city of New Orleans, but all over the country. This spirit can be experienced whenever African-Americans today congregate for just about any purpose (Branley 2012).

When speaking of the gentrification in the U Street Corridor, Toni Blackman recalls when the shift started to happen. This shift resulted in the closing of many places where members of D.C.'s Hip-Hop community, who were predominately African-American, would regularly commune. She explains that when artists have no place to commune, it's like missing out on "church". She insists that artists change spiritually and emotionally when they are able to grow and develop their craft, and for many members of D.C.'s Hip-Hop Community U Street was "church" (Anderson et al. 2014).

Blackman makes a compelling argument recognizing the connection that many make between music and spirituality, which is something that is not necessarily specific to only the African-American community, but has definitely influenced spiritual customs in other cultures. For this reason, one would expect the need for these spaces to be understood and preserved. Nevertheless, it appears that there have also been many efforts

to completely eliminate some of the city's most significant examples of its African-American culture, most particularly Go-go Music.

The idea that go-go music has been seen as an instigator of violent homicide throughout the city has been discussed previously. This idea that go-go music breeds violence was evident in May of 2012, when thousands descended on the Howard Theatre for a memorial service to honor the late “Godfather of Go-Go,” Chuck Brown. Fire marshals quickly arrived on the scene asking the crowd to disperse because of lightning and an approaching storm. The crowd refused to move, and instead began to chant “Wind Me Up, Chuck”, a refrain shouted at many of Brown’s concerts (Ali 2012). “Emotions were running high”, recalled journalist Abdul Ali for The Atlantic. “After all, go-go's Godfather had been laid to rest—following a decade of flagrant reminders that go-go music (or a big part of the population that listens to it, at least) isn't welcome in the new vision of D.C.” (Ali 2012).

Most have argued that go-go music itself is not the cause of violence. Artist and D.C. native Afi Lydia insists that go-go is a “uniting” music, and there is no secret message or code in go-go music that tells people to commit violent acts (Lydia 2014). Lydia and many other artists and residents of the city believe that there is a lack of understanding about the cultural significance of go-go music, therefore there isn't much respect for it. In her book *Go-Go Live: The Musical Life and Death of Chocolate City*, Natalie Hopkinson includes a quote from cultural activist Charles Stephenson, Jr., which states, "Go-Go is more than music. It's a complex expression of cultural values masquerading in the guise of party music in our nation's capital. Go-go music spoke for

the African-American community of D.C. throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, with such songs as 'We The People', 'We Need Some Money' and 'Bustin' Loose' doubling as party tunes and social commentary on what it was like to live in the city after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. and before the full arrival of crack cocaine" (Hopkinson 2012).

Here, Stephenson and Hopkins acknowledge the infamous rise of crack cocaine across the nation. The epidemic, however, seemed to hit the nation's capital the hardest, as D.C. became the American city with the highest murder rate, earning it the moniker "Murder Capital" in response to the wave of homicides that swept the city as crack infiltrated the streets and instigated drug and turf wars amongst dealers and addicts. "It's as innocent looking as candy," stated President George H.W. Bush as he addressed the nation from the Oval Office in 1989, pulling out a small plastic bag filled with crack cocaine that had just been seized by drug enforcement agents a few days prior in a park across the street from the White House. "But it's turning our cities into battle zones", he stated (Fenston 2014).

As stated before, the social unrest surrounding the topic of go-go music and the belief that go-go music is the cause for much of the violent crime in D.C.'s neighborhoods has caused many go-go clubs in the city to be closed. This has led to the opening of go-go clubs throughout the surrounding Maryland suburbs, which has now sparked debate between residents and Maryland government officials who are afraid of the alleged violent culture of go-go spreading into their suburban communities. The crime rate in Prince George's County, Maryland has risen tremendously in recent years, many

linking it to the influx of African American and Latino residents who have been priced out of the city, and the growth of a go-go culture that has, until recently, existed on somewhat of a smaller scale than it has in the city (Martinez 2014).

Prince George's County has recently been thrust deeper into the go-go battle, as a $10 million class action suit was filed in federal court, accusing Prince George's County's political leadership and law enforcement of denying citizens their freedom to dance. This follows the enactment of a 2011 emergency bill that requires businesses that allow dancing to seek a permit to do so, giving county law enforcement more authority to shut down businesses they consider "threats to public safety", and prohibits people with criminal records from obtaining dance permits. The ordinance quickly triggered protests from venue owners and music promoters, such as former owner of the Plaza 23 Event Center in Temple Hills, Maryland, Dan Richardson. The Plaza 23 Event Center, now closed, was the site of a 2011 homicide, which occurred after the venue hosted a concert by the go-go band TCB. This incident may have been seen as somewhat of the "straw that broke the camel's back", since the ordinance was enacted not long afterward (Martinez 2014).

The enactment of the emergency bill also came during a time when Prince George's County was experiencing a significant increase in homicides and violent crime, as more African-American residents from the city began to move into the area and new go-go venues began to open. The enactment of the emergency bill has also sparked a petition from fans of go-go who feel go-go bands are being unfairly blamed for the increase in homicides in Prince George's County, insisting that ordinances are being put

in place in order to create an obstacle for African-American venue owners and promoters, putting them in a position to possibly lose their businesses and leaving them no space to host events that cater to the go-go community. “If you look at how [the emergency law] was enforced, it was like it targeted small black businesses that can’t afford to fight back,” says Dan Richardson, who claims that he moved quickly to obtain one of the dance-hall licenses required by emergency law, but the Plaza 23 Event Center lost so much business during the application process that it was impossible for him to recover (Martinez 2014).

The Plaza 23 Event Center was closed in 2012, along with fifteen other county clubs that were shut down after a sweeping tax crackdown, in what prosecutors called “a crackdown on businesses that bring violence to the county and don’t follow its laws” (Zapotosky 2012). For many, there appears to be an attempted eradication of go-go culture in the area, and serves as a slap in the face to the African-American culture of D.C. and its surrounding areas. They believe it only helps to enhance the stereotypes that foster discrimination and a disdain for go-go music (Noble 2012).

The banning of go-go has struck a chord with many artists in the city, especially musicians like Lydia and Jackson, who are both natives of D.C. Lydia, who grew up listening to go-go, is extremely dismayed with the bad reputation that go-go has acquired. “Crack hit the African-American community hard, and since go-go music was Black music, the violence associated with the crack epidemic was unfairly blamed on go-go”, Lydia states (Lydia 2014).

Jackson didn't grow up on go-go as Lydia did, but the destruction of something that is a staple of the city that she comes from upsets her, as she speaks of an article she once read that proclaimed that D.C. now needed a new sound. "Here we have a man, Chuck Brown, who created a genre of music – it's actually in World Books- so, he's created history, and the audacity of them to disrespect it and throw it away like it doesn't mean anything…" (Jackson 2015).

When examining the attempted suppression of go-go in D.C., it is compelling how easily it connects with the ban on African drumming that was introduced during the era of slavery, once slaveholders began to realize that drumming was being used to communicate messages of resistance. In the 1740 Slave Code of South Carolina, it was written: "It is absolutely necessary to the safety of this province that all due care be taken to restrain Negroes from using or keeping drums" (Aptheker 1983). This successive ban on the use of African drums contributed heavily to the cultural disorientation of the slaves, and severely weakened their ties to the music that once fueled their African existence. The same can be said for today, as the continued "whitewashing" of the city of Washington, D.C. continues, and the music that is culturally significant to the city's African American culture is being barred for fear that it will spark a wave of violence, raising crime rates and creating an unsafe environment for the city's new racial demographic.

The hip hop community of D.C. has also undeniably experienced the ramifications of gentrification, and the loss of many venues and spaces along the U Street Corridor, a place where African-American music and culture flourished before

gentrification, with many artists on the panel, as well as other artists such as Gina Marie Lewis and Afi Lydia, referring to it as “Black Broadway”. Hip hop musicians in the city have been very vocal about their displeasure with the current state of music in Washington, D.C. The members of the hip hop community who participated in the Kennedy Center panel discussion appear to all have been affected, whether it be emotionally, spiritually or financially, by the gentrification of U Street. Many claim that the clubs and venues on U Street were undeniably the “training ground” for all the different forms of hip hop throughout the city. Rhome “DJ Stylus” Anderson recalls that U Street was like “boot camp”. “There isn’t any type of apprenticeship that happens in Hip Hop anymore on a large scale, not specific to D.C.”, he adds. “The loss of the culture on U Street is significant in that it is no longer a training ground for new artists to learn the craft” (Anderson et al. 2014).

Most of the artists on the panel agreed that the D.C. hip hop scene and the music culture in the U Street area were fundamental to the shaping of, not only hip hop culture, but the culture of African-American music in general. In the panel discussion, Anderson goes on to say that the music scene on U Street before the rise of gentrification was “magical”. He proclaims that it was like living the Harlem Renaissance all over again, and he undeniably felt the connection that the U Street Corridor had to its old moniker, “Black Broadway”. “Every genre of music was being performed at its best, not just hip hop. Anybody that was making anything Black and amazing was doing it on U Street” (Anderson et al. 2014).

It is easy to see how the transformation of the U Street corridor from a place where African American culture thrived to a place where there are hardly any African American businesses left may have contributed to a sense of brokenness in the African-American arts community. However, there are many artists, such as Jackson, who state that, despite the changes in the music scene in general, they have not personally experienced any significant loss in performance opportunities or any loss in motivation to keep performing. Jackson does, however, acknowledge that there are fewer and venues and spaces in which to perform, and a significant loss in the historic and cultural existence of D.C.'s music and arts scene. She states, "The opportunities are still there, but they're taking away the culture. They're giving you the body, but they're taking away the heart – so, it can't pump anymore. What is it going to do?". She goes on to say, "Many [venues] will be gone in about three years, maybe less than that. It's fading away" (Jackson 2015).

CHAPTER FOUR – VISUAL ARTS

Before the creation of D.C.'s Mural Arts Program, graffiti writing was one of the main examples of street art seen throughout the city. Many graffiti walls have been torn down since D.C. neighborhoods have started gentrifying, most notably neighborhoods in Northwest D.C. near the U Street Corridor. Graffiti writing is as ancient as human communication, but modern graffiti writing is most widely identified as an offspring of Hip Hop culture, and Hip-Hop culture originated in the African-American community (Christen 2003).

Graffiti writing gained widespread attention when it exploded into urban neighborhoods in the late 1960's and 1970's. Most Americans have come to associate graffiti writing with urban gangs, who use it to mark their territory, visibly challenging the idea of what is aesthetically pleasing by middle class and elite. These practices also pose a challenge to property concepts and sense of security to many posh urban dwellers. Although gangs have created a very large percentage of the graffiti seen throughout urban areas during the last three decades, most of it is more accurately linked to hip hop and a combination of cultural practices that appeared in the neighborhoods of New York, D.C. and other U.S. cities during the mid-1970's. Anthropologist Susan Phillips and other scholars have long debated that hip hop graffiti was actually created to exist as an alternative to gang graffiti, with writers organizing themselves in teams that battle each other through style and production as opposed to violence (Christen 2003).

As graffiti writing became more popular in American cities throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many became more and more opposed to it, branding it as destructive to property and to the aesthetic of urban communities. Some, however, praised it as a legitimate form of street art, and eventually would begin to gift graffiti writers walls to write on (Christen 2003).

As gentrification began to take place in recent years, many urban areas began to look for alternatives to graffiti writing that could prove to be more visually appealing. In Philadelphia, the Anti-Graffiti Network was started in 1984 by Mayor W. Wilson Goode, as part of a city-wide anti-graffiti initiative. Under this program, the Mural Arts program was spearheaded by artist Jane Golden, who was hired to reach out to young graffiti writers around the city and help them to re-direct their energies to create positive public art projects (Maule 2014).

Many cities began to adopt their own Mural Arts initiatives, including Washington, D.C. As part of the city's Murals DC initiative, artists are granted permission to create works of art on the sides, backs and, in some cases, fronts of various buildings and walls throughout the city. Like other cities, this was done to combat illegal street art on walls throughout the city that were unapproved. While these efforts seem to pose a compromise between artists and property owners in the city of D.C., many graffiti artists were not satisfied, since most of the funding and space was not given to street artists but to professional artists who were, in some cases, being hired or dedicating their work and time to the city. Graffiti writers who had a long history of creating magnificent street work were not being considered, which seems to support the claim that funding is only

given to certain organizations and individuals who create art seen as more acceptable to the changing arts climate (Maule 2014).

D.C. graffiti and recording artist Cory Stowers was very vocal about his dissatisfaction with D.C.'s Mural program, which was funded by the DC Commission of Arts and Humanities, during the Kennedy panel discussion on D.C. Hip Hop and Gentrification on U Street. During the panel, DC Arts and Humanities Legislative and Community Affairs director, Victoria Murray Baatin describes Murals DC as a training ground for young artists, declaring it as somewhat of an alternative or similar training program for graffiti writers. Stowers insists that it is not the same thing. "They're importing professional artists from other countries to come in and teach visual arts. That's not the same as teaching graffiti writing. There is an agenda, as Heady (Head-Roc) said, to make sure that certain artists are showcased and not others. It's not the artists who have put in the work. All the murals and graffiti painted in the 90's unfunded is all gone, and now they want to pay high dollar commissions to artists who are not from D.C. to come in and do things that they do not want to pay artists who are born and bred in the city to do" (Anderson et al. 2014).

Despite there not being many graffiti artists given a chance to participate in the commissioned and funded Murals DC Program, many neighborhoods in D.C. boast large murals that reflect the life, history and culture of the city. But, with the gentrification brought the reality that many of these murals will also be short-lived. Many of the buildings and walls in the city that hold murals are sought after to be torn down and remodeled, leaving the work of the D.C. artist, once again, demolished. The most recent

demolishing is the previously discussed razing of the Chuck Brown mural painted on the side of the Sweet Mango Cafe building, a well-known, Black owned business, at 3701 Georgia Avenue in the Petworth neighborhood (Goldchain 2015).

The mural, painted by students from MacFarland Middle School in May 2012 almost one week after the musician's death, is only one of many public memorials dedicated to the legendary artist in the city, including a park, a street named after him on the 1900 block of 7th Street Northwest, and a mural painted on the side of the U Street location of Ben's Chili Bowl. Nevertheless, the mural on the side of the soon to be relocated Sweet Mangos café will be torn down to make room for a new 21-unit apartment building being developed by Rooney Properties and PGN Architects (Goldchain 2015).

Each unit will range between one and two bedrooms, while the development's ground-floor will have retail. Before the property's redevelopment, a restaurant called, "3701 Jerk Station," will inhabit Sweet Mangos' space. Washington, D.C. resident and Project Director of D.C. Murals Perry Frank told Curbed DC, "I'm very, very sorry to hear about the destruction of the [Sweet Mangos] café and the mural." Currently, there is no word yet on when the building will be razed or the how much the units will cost (Goldchain 2015).

The removal of street art and the preference of new buildings and businesses run by people who are not of African descent, to some, is an indication that the culture that once shaped the city is no longer welcome in the new vision of Washington, D.C. The attempt to try to recreate the authenticity of graffiti art by presenting murals painted by

more refined artists also appears to validate the belief that art is being robbed of its truth in favor of something that is more superficial and polished. This ties directly to the discussion of authenticity, in which the works of graffiti artists and other artists who lived and grew up in the community before the rise of gentrification are seen as more authentic than works created by artists who were commissioned out-of-town artists who don't have as much of a connection to the culture of the community. The apparent attempt to silence the rebellion and resistance of graffiti artists throughout the city can also be tied to the suppression of the artistic expression of the slaves for fear that they will one day rebel against the system.

The visual arts community of D.C. remains a bit more split on the issue of gentrification and how it affects their work, with many professional visual artists seeing the Murals DC program and other initiatives as great professional opportunities. Other more independent artists, such as Wayson R. Jones and Gina Marie Lewis, have not really noticed any major effects on their audience or work as a result of gentrification, though they remain well aware of the effect gentrification has had on African-American artists in other genres.

Lewis states that her work is usually based on whatever she is going through at the time it is created, and she's been able to reach people of all demographics (Lewis 2015). Jones states that, even though he has noticed that certain sectors of the visual arts scene are very multicultural, and his audience and work has not been affected tremendously by gentrification, there are still some galleries that he has had to cross off of his list. "I've crossed certain galleries off my list because I just feel that sense of, not

so much entitlement, but that I'm not entitled to be there", he states, acknowledging very subtle but noticeable instances of racism and ageism in the visual arts community, and the sense of entitlement that exists within gentrified communities. "Gentrification carries with it a mindset of white supremacy", he states. "Not to go hardcore like that, but it is what it is. And it's not always so much like 'I hate you. I'm going to kill you', but it's the presumption of place – this presumption of owning and having this place. A sense of entitlement, is what it is" (Jones 2015).

Here, Jones acknowledges his idea of White supremacy, which falls more in line with the exact definition of White privilege – "a set of advantages and/or immunities that White people benefit from on a daily basis beyond those common to all others"– identifying the inability of Whites to recognize that many of the advantages they hold are a direct result of the disadvantages of others (www.mtholyoke.ed).

While Jones acknowledges the existence of gentrification and the sense of entitlement that many gentrifiers carry, he also acknowledges the fact that many white gentrifiers are also supportive of artists of color. "I know many White people who are very much gentrifiers, but who are also very supportive of African American artists in D.C., so I don't like to throw rocks" (Jones 2015). In a sense, what Jones is speaking of here is also sometimes interpreted as a form of White privilege by some, helping to support the view that "White privilege is having the freedom and luxury to fight racism one day and ignore it the next" (www.mtholyoke.ed).

CHAPTER FIVE -THEATRE

For many, it appears that theatre in D.C. has not been as affected as other art forms throughout the city. Artist Wayson R. Jones states that theatre seems to have survived gentrification in D.C., since D.C. boasts a remarkable theatre scene. At first glance, it appears that theatre in D.C. is booming with many African American actors and artists featured tremendously in various productions throughout the theatre season. However, beneath the surface the there are some who question whether or not the Black presence in the D.C. theatre scene is being relegated because of the lack of Black owned theatre companies in the city.

The concept of authenticity has also come up when discussing predominantly Black productions being produced by predominantly White organizations because of the lack of Black theatre companies in the city. The theatre community in Washington, D.C. has seen its share of the decline in African-American visibility. Now, with African-Americans representing only half of the population, there is only one full-time professional Black theater company, The African Continuum Theatre. There are no Black-owned theater houses or stages in operation. Despite this fact, however, a theatergoer might open a newspaper and find a "black" play on any given stage (Brown 2012).

Past seasons in Washington have been packed with plays by or about African Americans. Arena Stage has presented *Every Tongue Confess*, starring Phylicia Rashad; Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*, about rape in the Congo; and *Trouble in Mind*, a play by Alice Childress about race in show business. Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company has

presented such productions as *Bootycandy*, Robert O'Hara's play about growing up gay and African American. Theatre Alliance, a predominately White theatre troupe founded to "illuminate the interests of D.C.'s diverse populations," has presented a very spellbinding production of Langston Hughes's *Black Nativity* at H Street Playhouse. The Ford's Theatre opened its 2010-2011 season with *Sabrina Fair*, by Samuel A. Taylor, which featured a Black actress in the role famously played by Audrey Hepburn. *Fela!* the energetic real-life tale of legendary Nigerian singer Fela Kuti, which was produced on Broadway by Jay-Z, Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith, played to sold out audiences at the Shakespeare Theatre Company. This winter, Round House Theatre in Bethesda, Maryland, right outside of D.C., will produce the regional debut of Suzan-Lori Park's newest work entitled *Father Comes Home from the War, Parts I, II and III* (Brown 2012). This speaks highly to the notion that predominately White companies in the Washington, D.C. area are making it a point to diversify their offerings, providing work for a very large group of African-American actors who still reside in the area. However, the Black theatre community as a whole seems to be at a loss since gentrification seems to have reduced the Black population significantly, putting many of the Black owned D.C. area theatre companies out of operation.

While plays by or about Blacks have been proliferating in Washington, it seems that Black theater companies have not. According to Glenn Alan, executive director of the D.C. Black Theater Festival, which showcases national and international playwrights of color, the influx of black plays being produced "shows the hunger for Black theater in this city". Alan goes on to point out that the plays being produced are being presented by

“mainstream theater companies or on mainstream stages. Not by Black theater companies with their own spaces” (Brown 2012).

Mr. Alan’s words are poignant when examining the state of Black operated theatre companies in the district. The historic Takoma Theatre is Black-owned, but for years has sat shuttered in Takoma Park. The legendary D.C. Black Repertory Company, founded in the 1970s by Robert Hooks, is also gone. Its successor, D.C. Rep Stage produces plays in residence at Howard Community College in Columbia, MD, and the African Continuum Theatre stages its performances at the Atlas Performing Arts Center (Brown 2012).

Theatre director, administrator, and former leader of the African Continuum Theatre, Jennifer L. Nelson, states, “All regional theaters include plays by African Americans in their seasons.” Ms. Nelson goes on to say, “We have seen a number of our theaters go under. Since the economic downturn, it has gotten worse. What is the state of Black theater in Washington? This question keeps being asked over and over again. I wish I had an answer that would make it clear, because it is not 100 percent clear to anybody” (Brown 2012).

Many argue that the lack of Black theatre companies has to do with the lack of financial support from the Black community. “All of us (Black theatre companies) have to figure out new ways to earn money,” said JoAnn M. Williams, executive director of African Continuum. Williams said the company has shifted its focus to attempting to build an individual donor base with deeper pockets, but very few of the city’s wealthy Black patrons make substantial donations.

"There are African Americans with wealth," Williams said, "but they don't give us money." Williams contended that it is important to understand that black patrons need to support black theater companies with donations, not just ticket sales. "Buying a ticket is not the same as being a financial supporter of an organization," Williams said. "The proceeds from ticket sales don't cover the costs of a production" (Brown 2012).

But how can Black theatre companies survive when the Black population is declining? Many ask what happens when there are no longer enough Black people to support Black theatre and Black arts organizations? Some argue that the D.C. is not the only city currently experiencing this issue. Nelson adds, "This is not endemic to Washington, D.C." (Brown 2012).

This statement is astoundingly true, as a national economic crisis has hit theater companies across the country hard. DeNeen Brown of the Washington Post mentions many cities and states in America where Black theater companies have closed, including, most notably, Minneapolis, Philadelphia and New Jersey. Those that are still alive struggle to find other sources of revenue (Brown 2012).

While the closing of Black theatre companies is not happening just in Washington, D.C., one cannot help to notice that many of the other places on the list are places where many members of the African-American community are living on or below the poverty line and cannot afford to support local theatre, or where African-Americans do not make up a large portion of that city or state's demographic.

In Philadelphia, for example, the Black population is 43.6%, and the average Black person lives in a neighborhood with a 24.8% poverty rate (Denvir 2011). In

Minneapolis, White Americans make up about three-fifths of the population at 63.8%, while the black population is 18.6%. A recent study by WalletHub, a personal-finance site, found that Minnesota has the largest racial poverty gap in the nation. Black residents in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region live below the poverty line at a rate three times greater than that of White residents (Nickrand 2015). Also, about 62% of Black students in Minneapolis attend high poverty schools as opposed to 10% of White students (Guo 2015). In D.C., More than a quarter of the Black population live below the poverty line at 26%. The poverty rate of public school students is at 61%, with a Black student body of over 67%. (www.dcfpi.org)

With these statistics in mind, it seems easy to assume that the lack of support for African-American theatre and culture is directly linked to a low or declining Black population, and/or high poverty rates in Black communities where people cannot afford to support local theatre. This lack of support leads to the closure of Black theatre organizations, leaving mainstream theatre companies to produce predominantly Black productions. This is ultimately seen as part of the "swagger jacking" movement, where mainstream or predominantly white organizations are profiting most on the culture of African-Americans.

"D.C. needs a Black company with its own theater," says D.C. Black Theater Festival executive director, Glenn Alan. He adds, "On some mainstream stages, if it doesn't sing and it doesn't dance, it doesn't play. We need a house that will speak to the African American story without editing", vocalizing his personal belief that Black stories should be told without a revisionist eye (Brown 2012).

The problem of gentrification and its effect on the African American theatre scene is a very complex one with more than one theory. Evidently, there seems to be somewhat of a decline in Black theatre across the country, so it's safe to assume, as director Jennifer Nelson states, "the problem is not endemic to D.C." (Brown 2012). However, the statistics associated with the decline in the city of Washington, D.C., in particular, suggest that gentrification and the declining African American population may be affecting the city more than many artists may notice.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the information reviewed and the research conducted that gentrification produces a myriad of effects. The one central fact that remains, however, is that gentrification in Washington, D.C. seems to have more negative effects on the marginalized African American community than it does positive. In fact, no definite positive outcomes were discovered for African American artists or residents, and those artists who state that their work is not effected either still recognize the struggles of other Black artists, or they are aware that it's only a matter of time before their opportunities start to fade.

Gentrification as a whole and the idea of inauthentic appropriation seems to be grown from a sort of cultural ignorance of gentrifiers who either do not understand the significance of the people and the culture that is displaced as a result of gentrification, or they are not aware of or connected to the concerns that gentrification present for those displaced people.

After interviewing each artist, it is clear that gentrification affects each artist from each genre differently. For most of the visual artists and musicians, it is clear that gentrification does not affect many of the artists' work directly, despite the fact that the effects of gentrification in their communities and how it has affected other artists is obvious. For musicians, it presents the reality that resources, venues and opportunities are either not as available as they once were, or they're in the process of fading out. The

artists on the panel appear to feel very strongly about the displacement of D.C.'s hip hop scene, and the gentrification in the U Street area. Themes of destruction, displacement and loss were very prevalent during the panel discussion when speaking of the social, economic and political effects of gentrification.

One of the biggest examples of gentrification's negative effects is the issue surrounding the attempted banning of go-go music throughout the city. To many artists and residents who are D.C. natives, go-go is one of the city's lasting examples of African-American music and culture in the city, so the blatant attempt to eradicate this form of music was seen as a significant threat to the African-American cultural experience and the historical significance of African-American culture that exists in the city.

One of the most significant findings is that, while gentrification does affect D.C.'s African-American community in particular, gentrification seems to serve as an extension of the marginalization already experienced by African-Americans in general. To quote Wayson R. Jones, "I can't say that it [gentrification] effects Black artists any more than we're already disenfranchised as Americans. So, it's like once the boat sinks, everyone who is on that boat is going down" (Jones 2015). Jones' perception echoes the theory that I have arrived to as a result of my study. The disenfranchisement of African-Americans in general contributes to the feelings of destruction and displacement felt by residents and artists when Black communities are gentrified. African-Americans, as well as other minorities, who live in marginalized communities already experience limited resources, difficulty finding funding, property loss, eviction, economic and financial disadvantages, and political corruption. Many African-Americans feel that government support was

never given when minorities in these communities were most in need, and to witness support being given to new arrivals by policy makers and government officials in order to improve communities supports the perception shared by most African-Americans that black lives, indeed, do not matter. Displacing members of already marginalized communities, while helping to create opportunities, businesses and homes for more valued residents should not be a priority. The priority should be to help improve these communities and create opportunities for those who already call them home.

The appropriation of African-American culture has been seen, in many instances, outside of the confines of gentrification. However, this appropriation of culture appears to be very prevalent in the gentrification of Washington, D.C, particularly in neighborhoods where African-American culture already exists. It seems as if many gentrifiers are filtering out what they want to keep from these predominantly African-American communities and throwing away the rest. It may not be so malicious, in some cases, but the act of filtering remnants of a culture while pushing away the people who created it confirms the need for understanding and respect in cross culture dynamics that exist in all communities, but particularly in gentrifying communities with heavy African-American populations.

Realistically, there doesn't seem to be one specific antidote for issues associated with gentrification. Gentrification and the evolving structure for urban areas are very complex issues brought on by massive public investments made by local and federal officials, business owners, and other investors who organize and establish initiatives for urban expansion (Florida 2015). Creating more culturally inclusive and appreciative

urban communities will require the creation of more economically inclusive investments, along with securing improved federal and local commitments to addressing the concerns of marginalized communities, including poverty, crime and economic disadvantages.

One possible way to combat the issues associated with gentrification is for policymakers and community investors to ensure that the community has a place at the table before the gentrification process advances too far. This means bringing community members into the planning process from the start and making sure developers respect community goals and priorities before setting new goals and priorities that do not respect the culture and aspirations of the already existing demographic (Smith 2014). There are people who live in urban communities who dream of the day where they will be able to revitalize their communities, but they lack the finances and resources it takes to make it happen. Bringing these resources to the area while giving the residents an opportunity to be part of the plan helps to ensure that the community does not feel robbed. Giving the community the opportunity to grow and preserve its culture and legacy provides an opportunity for everyone to thrive in a happy, safe and collective environment.

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